

Contributions

Alleluia

The strife is o'er, the battle done;
The victory of life is won;
The song of triumph has begun,
Alleluia!

The powers of death have done their worst,
But Christ their legions hath dispersed;
Let shout of holy joy outburst,
Alleluia!

The three sad days are quickly sped;
He rises glorious from the dead;
All glory to our risen Head!
Alleluia!

He closed the yawning gates of hell;
The bars from heaven's high portals fell;
Let hymns of praise His triumphs tell!
Alleluia!

Lord! by Thy stripes which wounded Thee
From death's dread sting Thy servants free,
That we may live and sing to Thee,
Alleluia!

—Episcopal Hymnal.

THE EASTER MESSAGE

W. D. FURRY

Christ had died and along with his death hope had died out of the heart of his disciples. Only gradually had they come to believe that he was the Messiah that had come to redeem the nation. We can scarcely realize the depth of despair into which they were plunged by the death of Christ; even to the very last moment they expected some miraculous deliverance; and when the Messiah was hanging upon the cross and the scribes and Pharisees tauntingly cried out, "He has saved others, himself he cannot save; let him come down from the cross and we will believe in him," even then, his disciples expected that he would descend from the cross, and by the doing of some great miracle attest his divinity. It was only after they had heard the last words, "It is finished," had seen his head fall upon his breast, and had seen him breathe his last breath, could they make themselves believe that all was finished. The death of Christ was to them not only the death of a teacher and friend, it was the death of their *religious hope*; and when they carried him to his place of burial, they buried, not only one whom they had come to love more than life itself, but they buried their religious hopes as well.

They could not understand the necessity of a suffering Messiah; even tho Jesus had told them time and again that he could come to his glory only thru suffering, yet, because of their mistaken conceptions of the character of the coming kingdom, they were wholly unprepared for the death of Christ when it came, and as a consequence we find the disciples not only distracted and hopeless, but ready to return again to the occupation from which Christ had called them. And it was not until appearance after appearance and revelation after revelation was made to them that the death and resurrection of Christ were attestations of his divinity, and their former hope in him as the Messiah came back to them with greater force and clearness.

This message afterward became the burden of apostolic teaching and preaching. That which they emphasized in their sermons as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, is not the life and teachings of Christ, not even his passion and death but his resurrection from the dead. This message made its way in the world despite the Jewish prejudice against a crucified Savior, and the Pagan prejudice against the resurrection of the body, until within twenty-five years it has spread over Palestine, Asia Minor, thru-out Greece into Rome; and Pliny himself bears witness to the great number of Christians in that city. Perhaps none of these had seen Christ after his resurrection, and their belief, therefore, in him as their risen Lord must have been based solely upon the testimony that the first heralds of Christianity gave them. This testimony must have been very largely of a personal character; we do know, however, that it was sufficient to produce faith in many people. The witnesses that the church has to offer the unbelieving world today have been increased. Besides the personal witness of the believer, we have in the first place the testimony of several books written by a number of eye witnesses of the resurrection. In the second place we have among us the church, founded not primarily upon his teachings and character, certainly not upon his passion and death, but primarily indeed, upon his *resurrection*; upon this historic fact, the church, that went forth conquering and is destined to conquer the whole world, whose faith has pervaded almost the whole inhabitable world and that has already revolutionized moral, social and political life of the world, was founded. If Christ did not come forth from the grave then the Christian church is founded either upon a delusion or a falsehood, and to admit the possibility of either of these is to give up faith in the moral laws of the world; it is, indeed to believe that *falsehood* not *truth* has been not only the greatest moral reform of the ages but the parent of all other moral and social reforms that have contributed to the amelioration of the world. In the third place, the day itself is a witness. For centuries the seventh day had observed as the one day that should be kept holy unto God. But the Christians could not observe the day in which their Lord had lain in the tomb, nor could they pass over the day upon which he arose without some rejoicing. So without the law of the church, without divine authority or prophetic utterance the day was changed; and as the fourth day of July stands as a living witness to the Declaration of Independence, and the thirtieth of May with all its flowers bears witness to the Civil War, so the first day of the week stands as a living and an incontestable witness of the resurrection of Christ. Therefore, when, as Christians, we come together during the next few days in our places of worship, we shall be drawn hither, not by some poem or legend, not to admire a skillfully wrought fiction or picture, but we shall be drawn hither by the great historic fact of the resurrec-

tion of Christ from the dead. Upon this fact the whole fabric of Christianity rests; destroy it and the whole superstructure of Christianity will at once fall to the ground. The whole message that Christianity has for the world clusters around this fact; disprove it, and Christianity is reduced at once to a simple ethical system, and Christ only another of the world's great moral teachers and must be classed therefore, with Confucius, Zoroaster, Socrates and others.

But Christ was something more than a moralist, and Christianity is something more than an ethical system. The resurrection was not needed to attest the moral teachings of Christ. Christianity is not a new code of morals, neither is it merely a sanction to an old code of morals. Christianity is a revelation that brings the laws of the eternal world to bear upon the problems of this world.

The Easter message is first of all, that *God is love*. The best that the Pagan religion can say of God is, that he is *hate* or *indifference* or justice; but Christianity brings another revelation that *God is love*. God is love personified; Christ is love incarnate; but love incarnate is God for God is love. But to show this divine love in the world will not establish it. It is not sufficient to say and know that God is love; we must also know that love is the *great power* in the world, that God is stronger than the evil one, that life not death is triumphant and that holiness not sin is eternal. This revelation that love is all-powerful is shown to us in the resurrection of Christ. Easter day has given us instead of an unknown God a God that is known; instead of an indifferent God, a God whose heart pulsates with sympathy for the world and instead of a wrathful God that needs to be appeased by us, a God whose continual presence is an inspiration to love and service.

The Easter message is a message of *hope*. Over the broken tomb we read in letters of gold the one word, *hope*. In the angel's words, "He is not here, he is risen," we hear one word only, "hope." Easter day brings us the message not only that Christ has risen from the dead, but that he arose as the "first-fruits" of them that sleep. The love that in Jesus Christ was victorious over sin and death, is victorious in every follower of Christ. We now know that there is something more powerful in the world than sin and death, and that is righteousness, or a life risen with Christ. Love is not, can not be defeated. Righteousness or participation in the nature of God can not die. Easter day, therefore brings to us the blessed message, that as followers of Christ we also participate in his resurrection. What sorrows this rolls from the hearts of believers; how it strengthens our too-fainting faith; how it brightens the death chamber and the grave. This is the real Easter message. Lose it and you lose the whole significance of Easter.

Lastly, the Easter message is a message that the deliverer for which the whole world had long looked for *has come*. This is the